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Betel Nuts

What They Say
in Hindustan :::

Rhymed in English by
Arthur Guiterman

The Frontispiece after an
oil painting by Will Jenkins

Here's Frolic Truth
in oriental guise: A
verse may find him
who a sermon flies.

Paul Elder and Company
San Francisco and New York

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The Tomoye Press

Foreword

"Have
at you with a
Proverb."

These proverbs, and hundreds like them, are ever in the mouths of the people of Hindustan, giving spice and color to their speech even as the Betel Nut — the chewing-gum of the Orient — spices the breath and reddens the lips of the folk of the bazaars. Many of them are more than proverbs; they are really condensations of shrewd, pithy stories illustrative of native life in its varied phases — stories so well known that the repetition of a couplet containing the point conveys the whole tale to the mind of the hearer. It is literature in shorthand.

Some of the quaint sayings in this collection, gleaned in Bengal, in the Punjab, in Rajputana and even among the mountains of Kashmir and Afghanistan, have already appeared in the New York Times and other papers and periodicals, while others are now printed for the first time.

Betel Nuts

1

God ripens the mangoes.
The Farmer shakes the tree :
God cures the patient,
The Doctor takes the fee.

You have no Debts ? Indorse a Note.
You have no Cares ? Then buy a Goat.

Now hear the word the Brahman
said :
“ The Lion's Mane, the
Miser's Hoard.
The Serpent's Fang, the Brave Man's
Sword

Ye may obtain — when they are dead.”

Three were invited — here come Nine !
Water the porridge ; all shall dine.

He laughed derision when his
Foes

Against him cast, each man,
a Stone :

His Friend in anger flung a Rose —
And all the City heard him groan.

They toil not, but decry their bread.
They fight not, they defame the Dead.

Be this engraved :
“ The Man who misses his
chance.

The Monkey who misses his branch,
Cannot be saved.”

The Goat gave up her life : 'twas not
enough.

The Eater grumbles that the meat is
tough.

Betel Nuts

3

On deep-rutted roads that are
centuries old

The Cart and the Plodder
will travel, unled.

A Poet, a Lion, a Man wise and bold
Will beat out new pathways for Plod-
ders to tread.

In Summer, a Fan and a Tale, not too
long:

In Winter, a Fire, a Roof, and a Song.

He gave who had naught to give,
And Ruin came.

She went to milk with a sieve —

Is Fate to blame?

A Day or a Minute? a Year or a
Moon? —

Now, which does he mean when he says,

“ Pretty soon!”

Our Earth and Sky are weighty
querns;

Our Deeds and Strivings
heap the grains;

The Unseen Miller turns and turns;
Between the Millstones — what
remains?

The Good are two. I dare be sworn.
And one is Dead, and one Unborn.

We sin; yet think to 'scape the ills
That Life hath taught us
must ensue.

In every ear the Devil thrills.

“In all the world there's none like
you!”

Who cutteth onions sheddeth tears.—
The Mischief-maker lost his ears.

Betel Nuts

5

“**H**is bridle is jeweled: with gold
he is shod;
I loosen my Steed and commit
him to God.”

“The World,” said the Prophet. “hath
ways that are odd;

So tie thy good Steed and commit him to
God.”

So clever a Son of a Clever Man’s
Daughter

Am I, that a Cleverer fetches my water.

Why should the Happy Man
espouse
That lived so free before?

The Benedict hath but one house.

The Bachelor a score.

He shot at a Sparrow

And spoiled a good Arrow.

Though losses come and Fate is
rough.
On any road my fortune lies.

God's universe is wide enough.

And I have Hands and Feet and
Eyes.

Though flung into Ocean I'll rise from
beneath.

A Fish on each finger, a Pearl in my
teeth.

When golden Sunbeams rill not,
The Jewel shines but ill.
When Fortune smiles, who will
not?

When Fortune won't, who will?

Knowledge? Know each other.
Goodness? Love thy Brother.

Betel Nuts

7

Thou lackest. O Shirker.
Though long thou hast
prayed ?

Know. God's a good Worker,
But loves to have aid.

The Merchant prays for nothing worse
Than Idleness that bears a purse.

Buy not, like a hapless dunce,
Gauds unworth the keeping.
“Dear,” O Sahib, weeps but
once :

“ Cheap ” is always weeping.

Guard thou thy Secret close with all thy
wit,

That e'en the Angels have no news of it.

What home called "Home" is false.
I know:
My home, in truth, is soft and
deep.

And yet, as homeward now I go
To take my rest, the people weep!

Liars died in days of old:
Now, they never catch a cold!

Old Hassan turns from craft and
vice
To con the Koran's page:
The Cat has killed a thousand Mice,
And makes a pilgrimage.

The torrid Sun melts mountain Snows.
When Anger comes, then Wisdom goes.

Betel Nuts

9

Aree Comradeship was ours in
work and play;
Our Friendship strengthened
till, we knew not how.

It grew to Love — but Love may have
its day.

We shared one sorrow — what can part
us now!

I live between perils, abandoned by
friends.

Like an ant on a fire-stick lit at both
ends.

Let the Rock fall on the Crock.
Or the Crock upon the Rock. —
The shock will break the Crock.

Own the Horse in Fortune's bloom;
Should Fortune fail thee, be its Groom.

L

et Daughters marry when they
can:

Let Sons be wedded when they
would.

A woman's husband is a Man;

His husband is his Livelihood.

I had no teeth: He sent me milk. In-
stead.

Now I have teeth. will He not send me
bread?

A

nd what is Glory? What is
Shame?

And what is Virtue? What
is Sin?

The Man but dies and leaves a Name.—

The Tiger dies and leaves a Skin.

One Good Man here is better far

Than up above ten Angels are.

Betel Nuts

11

This under the rose,
But it's true to the letter:
The Man thinks he knows,
But the Woman knows better.

Before thou hast forded the River, O
Brother,

Reville not unduly the Crocodile's
Mother.

By diverse creeds we worship,
thou and I;
The Ear of One Alone re-
ceives our prayer.

Each turns his face in longing toward
the sky
To see his Secret Soul reflected there.

The King shall beg, the Beggar mount
the throne;

Earth laughs at him who calls a place
his own.

The Chiefs that peasants choose
by lot
They ne'er will be afraid of.

The Idol-Carver worships not:—
He knows what gods are made of.

The Goat made friends with the Grass
and Wheat:

Now what, oh, what may the poor Goat
eat?

Paint on water, plow the sky,
Wash the wind: or, thrice as
blindly.

Trust a Trifler, trace a Lie,
Treat a Selfish Craven kindly.

Toil and hoard in sweat and fear?
Money's good,— but much too dear!

Betel Nuts

13

The Rope is burned: Its twist-
ings still

The pallid Ash retains.

The Man is dead: What good and ill
He wrought in life remains.

What's in the Melon's Heart, the
Knife-blade knows.

What's in the Soul, the Sword of Sorrow
shows.

Small ills are the fountains
Of most of our groans;
Men trip not on Mountains.—

They stumble o'er Stones.

Forbear! Remember well
There are no fans in Hell!

God gives where gifts are vain,
Nor, giving, tires.

Man grudging gives to gain
His own desires.

"My Beard is burning!" one will cry.
Another lights his Pipe thereby.

"My wisdom aids the world!"
How sweet
That secret thought of great
and small!

The Sea-gull sleeps with upturned feet
To catch the Sky, if that should fall.

Making, he mars, like a Consummate
Baby.

Rocking the Cradle while pinching the
Baby.

Betel Nuts

15

The wondrous ways of Love are
known

To none but Love's adept:

And Tears have language, clear alone

To him whose eyes have wept.

Beware the Foe that falleth back;

The Goat's retreat prepares attack.

Ihurled the Missile: With edge
unstained

The Shard returned to its
parent Clay:

The Birds, all clamoring, whirred
away:

The Sin of Seeking to Kill remained.

"Why didst thou spit within the Sacred
Bowl?"

"I thought it was the Altar, on my
Soul!"

Oil till your blood is cold,
 Drudge till the grave is won :
 Man is the slave of Gold.
 Gold is the slave of none.

Who sells grain is a Merchant. Flee
 ye, then :
 Who hoards grain is a Murderer of
 Men.

“O Crocodile, why do you weep
 When Gunga in freshet is
 brown ?”

“Alas! for the River is deep!
 Alas! for the People will drown!”

The Crane that waited for the Sea to
 sink
 And leave dried fish to feed him, died.
 I think.

“O Allah, take me!” prayed
Ram Thunder.

Above him crashed and rolled
the Thunder.

“Not now!” he cried in fright and
sorrow.

“Not now, O Lord!—I meant tomorrow!”

Danger he challenges, laughing and
singing,—

Grasping the Tiger’s moustaches, and
swinging.

Error lurks along the way.
Horror where the moon lies
white.

Fear upon the hills by day.
Dread behind the door at night.

The Sword is the Olive Leaf’s Brother:
One Blade in its sheath keeps another.

The Fool met Fate. "Fair
Maiden, say,
Where goest thou?" quoth he.

And Fate replied, "Hold on thy way
Thou Man.—I follow thee!"

A Pampered Prince will taste the
Choice, alone.

A Starving Dog will bolt a Saltless
Stone.

Can Love devise
That Love shall not be seen?
Nay: Eyes meet Eyes.
And Love slips out between.

The Man that hath a trade must work
thereat.

The Barber, lacking custom, shaved a
Cat.

“**M**y cage of gold is hung with silk ;
The King and Court delight
in me :

My food is fruit, my drink is milk :—

I want my Nest and Hollow Tree !”

Two Sparrows for one rice-grain made,
a riot.

The Cat was Arbitrator :— all is quiet.

The Tiger came ! She slew him
And bore him from the house :
Then down the drain she threw
him :—

And yet, she fears a Mouse !

The harsh-voiced Raven thinks the Owl
can sing.

Among the Blind the one-eyed Man is
King.

Gems are lustrous. Youth is bold :
 This is sure :
 Pearls grow yellow. Men grow
 old —

There's no cure.

An Owl will lead you to a cave.

A Sin will guide you to a grave.

When toil is o'er, the Pipe is good.
 And after bathing, sleep and
 food :

But Smoking brings delight to none
 In darkness, hunger, storm or sun.

Who sports with ruffians earns his
 broken bones.

What business had the Eggs to dance
 with Stones ?

Betel Nuts

21

“**M**y home is a Shell
With an empty shelf.
Oh, bring me a Well
And I'll drown myself!”

Avoid suspicion: When you're walk-
ing through
Your neighbor's melon-patch, don't tie
your shoe.

The scimitar smites
Where the Buckler is weak.
The Fish has no rights
In the Cormorant's beak.

A Club he carries 'neath his arm:—
His name is “Mr. Do-No-Harm.”

If you suspect him.
 Then reject him.
 If you select him.

Don't suspect him.

"Oh, like a Drum I suffer soul
 despite:—

In daytime soundly beat, hung up at
 night!"

ADemon, sick of single life,
 In Lanka wed a Monkey Wife:
 The whence arose, by Heaven's
 Grace

(Tal Das declares), the English Race.

Appraise the Spring before you drink
 the Water.

Observe the Mother ere you take the
 Daughter.

Though we grasp, in time of trial,
 Windle-straws and rotten
 sticks.

Don't we know the Druggist's Vial
 Is the Juggler's Bag of Tricks?

The Baby Bird's Heaven is roofed with
 a Feather.

Go Feet that wear Sandals the whole
 earth is Leather.

Who cooked this rice?"
 "Not I! — that Worthless
 Hound!"

"'Tis very nice."

"Why — yes — I stirred it round!"

Distrust the man who hates the taste of
 curds.

The scent of clover and the song of birds.

The rankling wound your Anger
made.

That easy, careless Laugh
may heal.

And hurts, yet sore from Biting Steel.
Are cured by sportive Flash of Blade.

"My Foes are so many 'tis peril to
count.

I ride on a Tiger and dare not dis-
mount."

His head is rather thick.
But he is n't all a fool;
He knew the Ox might kick.
So he stood behind the Mule.

Be peaceful, yet prepared, for Harm is
quick.

A Sheep will bite a Man Without a
Stick.

Betel Nuts

25

Vain Idlers, think! (If think ye
can
That waste your days in
wanton revel:)

The Fiend is wrong to tempt the Man.
But Man is wrong to tempt the Devil.

Ben Ali, Ram Chunder and Jussuf
are tall.

But the Man with the Club is the Boss
of them all.

Shall Lords of Treasure
Stint their dole?
Don't weigh and measure:
Fill my Bowl!"

A Child will judge the Heart: a
Woman reads
The Eyes and Lips: a Man requires
Deeds.

Those that Say and Do. are good.
we say:
Those that Do but Say not.
great. we call.

Tell, O Fount of Virtue. what are they
That while Saying much. Do naught
at all?

The Ass knows seven ways to swim —
in stall.

But seeing water. clean forgets them all!

Isought your door in Mercy's
name.

And met Rebuffs and
Scorns:

The Bee unto the Rose-bush came.
But all it found was Thorns.

I own no tears wherewith to cry:
I have no leisure e'en to die.



If the Breakfast is bad all the
Day will go wrong
('Tis hunger enfeebles the
arm of the strong).

If the Marriage is bad all the Life will
go wrong
(The tongue is a scourge with a barb
in the thong).

The Fair is dull as a sermon's end
To him with never a Coin to spend.



Shrink into Hell's abodes.
O'erleap the sun —
Flight hath a thousand roads,
My Vengeance, one! "

" I'm like a Camel: Nights and morns
I carry Sweets but feed on Thorns! "

The Unbeliever trusts the Eye;
The Ear of Fate hears wondrous things:

Though Mecca's holy man can't fly,
His mullahs' tongues can lend him wings.

A Queen are you and a Queen am I.—
But who will spread the clothes to dry?

Death is the Boding Crow that
wheels
O'er homes of low and great.

Death is the Camel Black that kneels
Unbid, at every gate.

Quoth Mitten the Miser when mellow
with wine,

“Save Cupboard and Wardrobe, the
Whole House is thine!”

“**T**he wells are dry; the cattle die
 Amid the shriveled grain.
 Above, the crown of the head
 is burnt;
 Below, the sole of the foot is burnt:—
 O Great God, let it rain!”

The Foe that hurts me not, I hardly
 fear:

The Friend that helps me not, is never
 dear.

Sugar is crisp as the sand,
 Sugar is white as a fleece,
 Sugar is pleasant and bland,—
 But not so sweet as Peace.

A Shower of Honey on a Sugar Shed
 Is shamed by speech of Lovers newly
 wed.

W

hen Life is woe.

And Hope is dumb.

The World says, "Go!"

The Grave says, "Come!"

Where ships have steered, the caravan
may trail:

Where winds the caravan, the ship may
sail.

Athousand times I dived, yet
found

No Pearl: the fault was not
With Me, nor Thee, nor yet the Sea,—
'Twas my unhappy Lot.

Smile at Wrongs thou canst not right:
Kiss the Hand thou darrest not bite.

“**O** Allah,” prays the Cat in
hungry zeal.
“Send blindness on my Lord,
that I may steal!”

“O Allah,” prays the Dog. “endow
with meat
My Lord, who, being filled, shall bid me
eat!”

Who gives a Man a Child to nurse,
Or trusts a Woman with a Purse?

Hal Mir’s Cat is grown too fat
To hunt her prey and snatch
it.

A mouse she saw and wagged her paw
To bid her Master catch it.

Why ask my answer, strong-armed un-
believer?—

What answer can the Mutton give the
Cleaver?

Though called, when up and
earning.

Thy Sweetheart's Darling
One.

In want and fever's burning
Thou art thy Mother's Son.

God that makes the Egg to live,
Shall Man ask and Thou not give?

Choose: Peace or Death! What
good is life
In hate and fear?

Let One, or Both: or else our Strife
Be buried here!

I stoned the Mango Tree and sweet
fruit fell.

My Foe misuseth me.—I'll use him
well.

The Teeth are thirty-two, in sharp
array:

The Tongue is lone and
weak, and yet among

The silent Teeth it dwells, and talks all
day.

Yet takes no harm:—how clever is
the Tongue!

She scolds at the Thunder, she scowls
at the light.

She spits on the thorn-bush and dares it
to fight!

In evil days
Draw good from every harm.
Your roof's ablaze?—

The Flames will keep you warm.

“He has killed a thousand men!”

“Ah! he's half a doctor then.”

Above the lintel wrote the lagging
guest:

"An Uncle's Dwelling is a
Place of Rest."

His Cousin scrawled beneath that ser-
vent phrase.

"If One remain not more than Seven
Days."

Are we babes for threats to fright?
"Mother's Bear" will never bite.

The Rain of June with crystal
spears

Assails the Mold: Our
acres thrive.

And Famine's Footprint disappears.
And Five becomes as Thirty-five.

A Word informs the Wise at once;
A Hundred Lashes teach the Dunce.



an hath one Beauty: Dress, the
Pundit's hold.

Hath Beauties fifty-score.

Ten thousand Beauties glow in Gems
and Gold;

In Love, ten million more.

Go all their own repasts:

The Swan eats Pearls, or fasts.



he Donkey turns an hungry eye
Upon the fields all bare and dry.
Then waxes fat, the happy

Ass.—

He think he's eaten all the grass!

A Lie has no beginning.

No Liar owns to sinning.

The Comb was the Bee's.
But by Man it is eaten.
The Sin was the Flea's.
But the Bedding is beaten.

O crafty Bee, which dost thou bring
To me — the Honey or the Sting?

Do Flowers lose their fragrance
when they bloom where none
may mark?

Are Rubies dull and worthless when
they lie on mountains lone?

Is Honey harsh and bitter when 'tis
eaten in the dark?

Is Love the less delightful when to
all the world unknown?

The Merchant has no time to smoke a
pipe:—

Who finds a Crow asleep when Figs are
ripe?

We're stripped as bare as a bone!
The Thief and his Stick
were Two.

My Father and I were all alone.

So, pray, what could we do?

Within the Temple thrives the Scamp.
'Tis darkest underneath the Lamp.

The Jackals show their teeth, the
Monkeys chatter,
The puissant Sparrows blus-
ter,— does it matter?

The Dogs may tear his red caparison,
But, undisturbed, the Elephant goes on.

I've found my Knife,— but where are
you, O Hound!

When I find you, my Knife cannot be
found!

The Elephant is guided by the
Goad:

A Club will keep the Bullock
to the road:

The Bit and Spur subdue the restive
Horse.

And naught controls a Simpleton but
Force.

Though gentlest hands re-knit the
silken Chain

Of Severed Friendship, still the Knots
remain.

One glimpse of Home will make
A Cripple sound.

Nor Head nor Feet will ache
When Homeward bound.

The Rains have come! The Rice-
blades spring!

The Farmer cares not who is King!



y wrath is more than tongue
can utter!

The Cat beneath my hand
shall quail!

'Twas not enough to steal the butter.—

The Vixen sniffed, and shook her tail!

We measure Towers by the Shadows
thrown.

And Great Men by the Slanders idly
blown.



laugh is due

When Fate's grim jests are
hurled.

What's Death to you

Is Fun for all the world.

She's vain and saucy, proud and idle.—

An Old Mare with a New Red Bridle.

The eager Fish
Repents within the Net.
Young lovers Wish.

And married men Regret.

Death took him off.
But cured his cough.

Lost and gone, like the Fame of
Kings.
Like a Woman's Faith, like a
Horse's Wings.

Like the Morning Mist, like the
Evening Red.

Like the Horns that grew on the
Donkey's Head!

His sympathy is cold: Beneath
The Weeping Eyes are Laughing
Teeth.

Betel Nuts

41

The Water-lily spreads her petals
white;

The Moon, twice forty thousand leagues above.

Upon her pours a flood of tender light.

Oh, Time and Space are naught to
them that love!

Whose hands are clever, Labors all his
days;

Whose Tongue is clever, Speaks — the
World obeys.

My Hair hung low, a glossy
Braid;

Thy Beard was down upon
thy Chin;

Our Love, the Love of Youth and Maid,
To which all other Love is Sin!

The Roots of Strife are three, all told:
A Woman first, then Land, then Gold.

Love must love, and Love must
rue;

Who the flame of Love may
smother!

I am dying, Love, for you:

You are dying for Another!

When Feasts are spread, the Doctor
mixes Pills.

In Fifty Dishes lie One Hundred Ills.

No more he dances, feasts and
sings;

The Married man is bound
to Toil.

His mind is full of Other Things.—

And those are Salt and Wood and Oil.

What's that? You "Saw?"—I won't
believe a word!

You only "Saw!"—I'll tell you what
I Heard!

Betel Nuts

43

The day he came we called him
"Friend":

The second day we styled him
"Guest":

The third, "Our Caller": at the end
Of seven days, "A Very Pest!"

Forbear to kill him for the sake
Of all the Widows thou wouldst make.

"**M**y Love departs with dawning
light:
Mine eyes are dark with
sorrow.

I pray Thee, Lord, make such a Night
That there shall be no Morrow!"

He's like the Golden Knife: unfit,
they say.

For any use, too good to throw away.

The Butter that the Farmer sold
was bad:

The Merchant's weights were
false, and light as air;

Each thought himself a Cheat, and so
was glad.—

And yet the Bargain that they made
was fair.

The Judge, though knowing naught,
must try to tell

What Plaintiff and Defendant know
too well.

The Farmer prays for Rain,
The Washerman for Sun:
If Prayers were not in vain
The World would be undone.

A Garden Wall is easy leaping;
The Blind Man's Wife is in God's
Keeping.

Betel Nuts

45

To all the World thy Bosom's
Joy disclose.
So Men shall envy thee thy
High Estate;
But let thine own Roof cover all thy
Woes—
Tie not thy Troubles to the Village
Gate!

My own good Son is a Son indeed;
My Neighbor's Son is a Worthless
Weed!

They find life sweet
That Earn and Eat;
And they will earn
That Lose and Learn.

Fair is the Hope of a distant day;
Blue are the Hills that are far away.

These Letters Black are Seeds,
the which my Pen
In snowy furrows diligently
sows:

The Harvest shall be reaped by other
men.—

But what shall be that Harvest, no one
knows.

Even Cleanliness is sometimes out of
place:

The fussy Housewife washed the
Tiger's face.

The Donkey to the Camel said,
“How dainty are your feet!”
The Camel to the Donkey said,
“Your voice is very sweet!”

Strangers serve the Swindler's ends:
Merchants, only, cheat their Friends.

The Promise may be broken
That's made when Youth is
new.

But not the Promise spoken
'Twixt Thirty-Teeth-and-Two.

Who goes to Law cries out, "Alack!
Come, Poverty, sit on my back!"

Good Madam Cat, you've bitten
off my Tail;

Now let me go, to squeak
through all the house

And rummage shelf and cupboard, tooth
and nail;

For Life is sweet, e'en to a Tailless
Mouse.

The Jar of Wine for the Rich Man's
Hall;

The Wayside Spring is the Friend of
All.

Six years thy Son is all his
Mother's own
To love and tend:

Twelve more he is thy Care.—and then
alone
Becomes thy Friend.

Look to thy Letters, thy Horse's Girth
Thyself, though served by all the Slaves
on Earth.

In August drouth the Jackal
Whelp was born:
September poured his waters
on the plains:

Then cried the Cub in wonder, "I'll be
sworn.

In all my Life I've never seen such
rains!"

Rust cracks the empty Pan:
Sloth breaks the Husbandman.

The End of the Book

The Caravan hath reached the Journey's Goal.

And glad is Wayworn Friend embracing Friend :

The Pen hath reached the Bottom of the Scroll.

And, gladder still, the Pundit writes, " The End."

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